



Superior Court of California County of Riverside

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MEDIA ADVISORY

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<http://riverside.courts.ca.gov/newsmedia/newsmedia.htm>)

RIVERSIDE COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT ANNOUNCES FAMILY PRESERVATION COURT GRADUATION

Sandra Hernandez missed most of her oldest son's birthdays because of her meth addiction, but it took the threat of losing him to foster care before she got clean.

On Friday, Hernandez will be among 26 graduates of the Family Preservation Court Program at the Superior Court in downtown Riverside. The court-ordered program offers parents battling substance abuse a chance to become sober before their kids are placed in foster care.

"I had always dreamed of my son's first day of kindergarten but when the moment came I cared more about getting high," said the 26-year-old Riverside resident. "The program helped me regain control of my life so I can be a better mom."

Members of the media are invited to attend the graduation ceremony.

Parents' substance abuse is a primary reason children enter foster care, said Susan Loew, director of the county's Department of Public Social Services. The yearlong program offers comprehensive services ranging from parenting and anger management classes to job-hunting assistance.

The program has shown results. Participating parents are reunited with their children about six months sooner than parents who don't participate. In 2008, 817 children were reunited after their parents entered the program. Reducing the need for services provided to the children and their families saved an estimated \$6.3 million in taxpayer funds.

In 2006, Riverside County became the nation's first county to identify parents eligible for the program before their children entered foster care. Dependency filings increased an average of 13 percent each year from 2001 to 2006 but the number of foster-care cases dropped 43 percent in 2008.

“We believe the emphasis on prevention has helped us reduce the number of referrals to foster care,” said Presiding Judge Thomas H. Cahraman. “We are reuniting families and empowering parents so they can care for their children.”

The graduation ceremony begins at 3 p.m. in the Board of Supervisors Chambers in the County Administrative Center, 4080 Lemon St. in Riverside. The keynote speaker will be Commissioner Pamela Thatcher, who most recently presided over the Family Preservation Court program. Music will be provided by the Corona High School Madrigal Choir.

The media is invited to attend. For more information, call Judge Cahraman at (951) 955-5536.